CHRISTIAN MYSTERY:

A Chinese Tale,

FOUND IN THE PORTFOLIO

OF A

PORTUGUESE FRIAR.

Hear, O prodigy; O Tenderness! O Mystery!--He has just drowned the Fathers;---and now he will die for the Children!

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CHRISTIAN MYSTERY,

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COMMERCIAL affairs had engaged me to make a sea voyage. I had got far from the shores of my native country, when a dreadful tempest threw me on an unknown coast; however, I fell into the hands of a very humane people, and soon found they had brought the arts to great perfection, that they practised many virtues, and appeared to me in a state as enlightened as humanity could attain.

My admiration of them equalled my gratitude, but, alas! it is but too true, that man always discovers by some failing the weakness of his being.

These people shewed as much friendship towards me as I could possibly do to them; their mildness and civility entirely gained my affection. They said to me one day, "Of what religion are you? The question surprised me; I asked them if there were two religions, at which they smiled, and I saw they were astonished at my ignorance. "My friend," said one of them, "give thanks to God for having conducted you amongst us to be instructed in our holy religion. You do not know then that God has made himself a man?" I assured them it was the first time I had heard of it, and asked them why he had become a man? Know, continued they, "that the first man ate an apple which God had forbidden him, in consequence of which all his posterity were condemned to eternal punishment. At another time men became so crimi-

nal that the Almighty repented of having created them, and drowned them all with the exception of eight persons. The posterity of these became no better, God continued to be displeased, and as it was necessary to reconcile him to mankind, God the Son became a man to appease God the Father."

This divine family astonished me a little. And the daughter of God, said I, what is become of her? They answered gravely, "God has no daughter."

Oh! he has but a Son: but how do you know the sex of this Son? They answered, God is incorporeal, he has no sex. I insisted how could God the Father produce God the Son? He begot him. God has a sex then, he must also have a wife. They smiled at me again. But when did the father beget this Son? From all eternity. My friends, there is an apparent contradiction, it is not possible for the Son who was begotten to be as old as the Father. Has the Father then any other children? No; but there is a third person who proceeds from the Father and the Son. I suppose he was begotten also? No; certainly not: pray take care what you say, or you will be guilty of heresy. I replied, I did not understand them.

O, Sir, these are mysteries which God himself has revealed to men, to the end that they might understand nothing. Wonderful, said I. They continued: God wished to humble men's reason, that is, to give them a disregard for the most precious gift they hold of his bounty. And you make no use of your reason then? O-yes; we are allowed to use it in all other actions of our lives, but in matters of religion it would be impious. Better and better, said I. So then I find you have three Gods? No, no, replied they, we have indeed three persons, of whom the first is the Father, the second is the Son, or word, the third is the Holy Spirit; but all these three make only one God. How, Gentlemen? these three make but one, and one makes three? Yes; it is so, replied they, though

contrary to all the rules of arithmetic; you must know that our theology is far superior to this petty science; however we will explain the whole to you.

What do you call the third person? said I. The Holy Ghost. Has the Holy Ghost been a man also? No; but he became a pigeon; we do not know, indeed, that it was his natural form, but when he appeared to the apostles he was pleased to borrow that shape.

And the Son of God has been a man from all eternity? O no, only seventeen hundred years.

Of whom, and how was he born? He was born of a virgin. She would certainly be much surprised knowing herself to be a virgin? O yes; you are right; but an angel came to prepare her, that she might not be alarmed in being brought to-bed. Yet I suppose you will be still more surprised when we tell you she was married? O no; pardon me, I understand this mystery better than all the others. Nay, do not jest, Sir, her husband had not slept with her; we have it so revealed to us. And pray how did she conceive? By the operation of the Holy Ghost. But you say that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Son; how then could he produce the Son? Yes, Sir, it is so, by the infallible decision of the holy church. And who was his mother? The wife of a carpenter. What kind of a life did he lead? He served thirty years in his father's shop, and was very serviceable to him. Indeed, gentlemen; very well! I perceive you have sublime notions of the divinity. At the age of thirty he began to preach to the people in the country, which lasted some time; at length the magistrates became displeased, because in his sermons he said a great deal about rich men, and the officers of government. He foresaw that he would be punished, and perspired both water and blood. Indeed!. that is another fine trait in his character.

At length he was arrested by the magistrates, and crucified between two robbers. And he died? Yes. And was buried? Yes. Well then I suppose that is

the end of his history? Hold, Sir, you go too fast; he died, it is true, but it was in consideration that God would pardon mankind. Oh, I understand you. God would pardon the sins of mankind because they had killed his Son. Truly, nothing could be better imagined. But know for testimony of his divinity, he rose again the third day. And what proof have you of this? The writings of the disciples. But what said the people? They contradicted it.

Oh, gentlemen! I find you are as well provided with proofs as with reasonings; but did he perform any other miracles? Yes; he cured those possessed of evil spirits; dried a fig tree; sent devils into a herd of swine; filled the nets of his disciples with fishes, and changed water into wine; but he loved so to humble himself, that never in his life did he own that he was God. And why do you believe it? His sectaries have disputed a long time on this important article, as well as of the Holy Ghost, because three persons were not spoken of in the Old Testament. The Holy Ghost was found out to be God after twelve hundred years had passed over, and as for the divinity of Jesus, three hundred years of disputes, troubles, and massacres sufficed to decide the matter in his favour.

As you love this God so much, I suppose he was born in your country? No; he was born in another quarter of the globe. Indeed! You go very far to seek your gods! He must then have left a book of doctrines of religion, which you thought proper to adopt? No! he did not teach a new religion, neither did he write any thing; but some of his disciples have written his history and discourses. And your religion is there exactly prescribed? Oh, no! We have only a few particulars of his life, accompanied by some moral precepts; he has there declared that he came to fulfil the ancient law, and not to change it. Then there was a particular religion in the country where he was born, before his time? Yes. And it

is that same religion that you still observe? No; ours is in direct opposition to it. But whence then is this new religion, for you own that it was never announced by your God? We have explained, commented, interpreted without ceasing these seventeen hundred years on the discourses of Christ; and have drawn from them a long succession of dogmas and mysteries quite new. And do you all agree in these interpretations? No; far from it. We have always been disputing, fighting, and killing one another on account of them. Well, I am very sorry to tell you that I do not think your religion very attracting. What do you say? You do not agree in your explanations, and you quarrel and kill each other about them? Your religion does not at all please me; yet I suppose it had been adopted by the people of the country where your God dwelt? You are again deceived; Christ had but a very small number of disciples, and these were from the lowest class of the people. Have we not already told you that he was put to death by order of the magistrates? What do you say, gentlemen? Was not his doctrine believed by the people he attempted to instruct? No. His miracles, have they not persuaded those who were witnesses? No. And why should you believe them; you who came seventeen hundred years after him? O, Sir, all things require an explanation. Know then that God sent his Son among this people whose hearts he had hardened, purposely that they might not believe in him.

Well explained! I am quite delighted with your mode of reasoning; but pray what name do you give this people? Jews.—Jews! Jews! I never heard of them. No, I believe you. They occupied such a small territory, that their reputation did not extend far; nevertheless, they were formerly God's favourite people. God chose them from among all the nations of the earth; he governed them himself, and often conversed with their chiefs. Sometimes through tenderness for his people he ordered them to massacre

each other; and at one time twenty three thousand were put to death by their own citizens at the express command of God.

God ordered one of the kings to murder every man of a nation they had vanquished; the king had the audacity to spare some who were not in a state to defend themselves and was punished for it. A son of this king was condemned to die for eating honey on the day of battle, and God, who was justly irritated at the father as well as son, proscribed them both, and made choice of a new king.

This king (whom God had expressly chosen) committed adultery with the wife of one of his generals, and massacred her husband. By the adultress he had a son who kept seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines in his seraglio; but you must know these two kings were cherished by our God; both had heavenly benedictions heaped on their heads. The father was the man after God's own heart, and the son was the wisest of men. The Son of God, who became a man, descended in direct line from this *wisest of men*, and from the adultress of whom we have just spoken.

O, gentlemen, exclaimed I, you make me shudder at your impious ideas. They resumed. Have we not told you that the conduct of this God was always mysterious, purposely to humble our weak reason? The first legislator whom God gave to his favourite people was an assassin; but he had nevertheless the gift of performing a number of miracles. He composed a body of civil and religious rites and laws which we still revere as having been inspired by the Deity. And yet, you do not observe them? No; truly. We hold those people in horror who do so. It is true, that this was formerly the favourite people of God, and all other nations were rejected; afterwards the other nations were chosen, and this favourite people rejected. Do you not admire, Sir, the wisdom of the God we adore?

At this discourse, I stole away from them, and could scarcely persuade myself it was more than a dream. Having before seen to what great perfection this people had attained in every human science, I began to fear the weakness of my nature, and determined to return to my country, lest those abominable European prejudices should make me forget my duty to my fellow-creatures, and reverence for the God of all worlds.

THE END.